Gornergrat has a very small amount of precipitable water (less than -1 mm) and of course very low ambient temperatures (down to -20°C or so). After some time spent on the installation of the telescope and auxiliary facilities (a small workshop, electronic equipment for guiding and data acquisition with a PDP 11/34 computer), the facility is now in full use. For the purpose of operating the telescope, a Center for Infrared Astronomy has been established in Florence as a joint venture of the Arcetri Astrophysical Observatory and the National Research Council, under the general direction of M. Landini. The main purpose of the Center is to operate the telescope as a national facility, to prepare the required advanced instrumentation and to carry out research in infrared astronomy. Concerning the instrumentation (in addition to what has already been developed in other Italian institutes), a Florence team led by P. Salinary is now busy making available for general observers in the near IR a new very sensitive InSb spectrophotometer (already operational) and a cooled spectrometer (which should become operational late in 1983). Additional future plans include the use of two-dimensional arrays and CCD development, subject to decisions about funding levels.

In any case, a new important facility is now available in Europe in one of the most exciting areas of modern astronomy and its use is not restricted to Italian astronomers despite the heavy booking of the first few months of observing time. Having joined ESO, being on the verge of inaugurating the first of two new 32 m radio telescopes (mainly for VLBI studies), the Italian scientific community looks forward to the use of the new telescope and to the increasing chance that the Ministry of Education will in the near future support the long awaited project of a national 3.5 meter optical telescope.

F. Pacini, Osservatorio di Arcetri

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The new Italian infrared telescope on Gornergrat.

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